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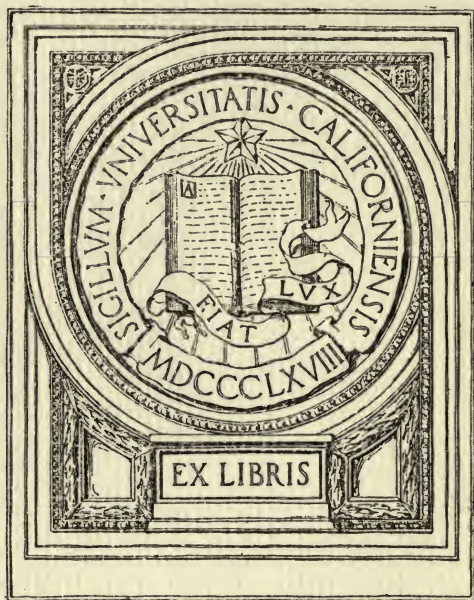
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Tomorrow's Yesterday

A Book of Poems

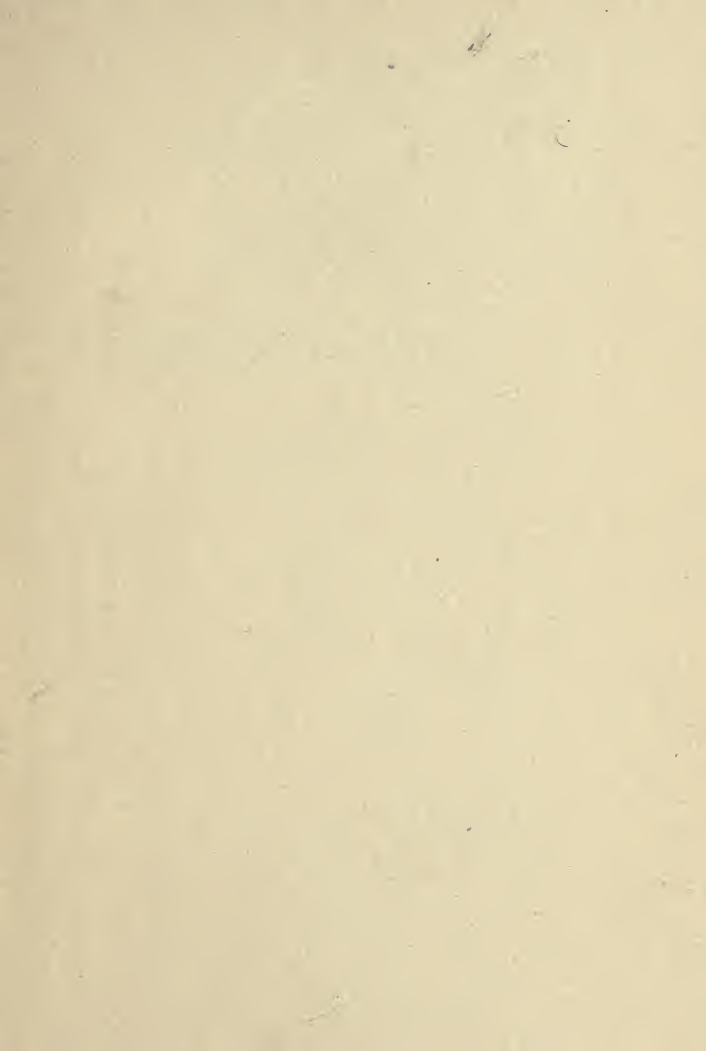
By

ERNEST BENSHIMOL



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TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY



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TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY

A BOOK OF POEMS

BY
ERNEST BENSHIMOL



BOSTON
SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



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*A little rhyme
To set the world in harmony
With itself—
A little elf
To cast it spinning through the sea
Of Time.*

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TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY



TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY

MARSH DREAMS

The moon was over the silver marsh
And a flood of light on the grasses lay
That like a sea from the distant surf
In shadowy ripples across a bay
Of unreality in the night
Beckoned the brooding soul away.

This is a story of self and self,
With trial and judgment and love of life;
No death too swift to eternal rest,
The depth that fathoms the end of strife,
When soul hath unto the soul confessed.

I was alone in the wildwood and the fen,
I was the child of the salt marsh and the tide,
Grown so, nor born to the deal — nor death was mine
Deep in the soft breast, deep in the silencing arms
Of sand. I care not that your carrion eyed
Me so, your stalwart keepers of the law,
I am no beast to strike with beak or claw,
Not I the reed-toothed viper of the glen
To fang you low yet nearer to your heart
Than whisp of steel: my passing heeds, not harms,
Your own. Begone, and let me so depart
Like to the foam white whispering in the brine.

If I but lie, if I but hold the thread
That twists across its own sad path and leaves
No grain of truth to stand among the sheaves
Of imaging,
And if I sing
Like some poor madman that I seem, of life
Deep drawn and shadowed, then there is no wife
Of mine that sleeps among the murdered dead.

II

Love you the mist-swept moor
And the dreaming sea?
Love you the pale moonlight
And the stars that linger
Like a last note that whispers at the finger,
Love you the desolate solitude of life?
Then you love me.

Have I said desolate, night,
When a god I am grown with the gust?
Oh, drown the lie at my lips
And the sea will I take to my breast
And the mist for a shroud!
I have loved thee and scorned thee together,
I have withered the wave at its crest,
I have banished the moon with a cloud,
When I loved I was strong with thy strength,
In my scorn I was poorer than dust.

III

If you convict or grant me withering pain
Of life, you are but judges of the slain,
Not me, I know myself. You cannot find
One judgment other, for the shifting mind
Is door and threshold to the soul. A glance
Of love makes glade of desert circumstance,
A kiss turns silver moonlight into wine,
A sin is gift of heaven flung to hell,
That reels and slinks and feints and will not tell;
Judge now if that be mine!

And we are followers of the day, not night,
Not night beneath whose awesome breast I pitch
My tent; between whose firefly expanse
And death lives but the firefly. I knew
The wild cloud and the rain; I felt the switch
Of summer torrent on my cheek; I smote
A kiss into life and still it would not float
Far from the lips that banished it to flight.
Oh, thought of life is dross of life and all

Dies like a senseless flower in the dew;
I cannot rise so high I shall not fall
Nor dream to climb eternity with a glance.

IV

I will breathe me a scarlet fire into the dust,
I will strew a measure of pearls upon the flame
And let the smoke rise wreathing to the stars!
Oh, burn thy time and neither wait nor trust
If thou hast taken life and wilt no blame,
Take thou thine own and leave no coward trace
To come when thou art gone and haunt the place.

He was a man of strength, to cast the stone
Pebblewise out above the surf until
The eye was lost upon the wave. Alone
Befriended of the cataract of men
Who seek to balance wisdom on the tip
Of the seagull's wing or splurge it from the pen
He did not ponder with the fool, nor slip
Into the calyx of the snow-white death.

He saw the torrent rushing to the main,
He saw the sun that drew it into rain,
The wind that flung it as a kiss is flung,
The earth that held it deep its veins among,
And laughed, for to the bosom whence it sprung
Turned it forever back again.

V

Lamp of the dark night,
Lamp of love,
In her eyes I saw the gleaming,
Moon of the whippoorwill,
Moon of the sea,
In my realm of far above
On thy face is dreaming
Smile to comfort me?

Leave thy waters, leave thy forests,
Let the vision of thy face
Dance among the little planets
In the loneliness of space.

In my soul I wish, I want thee,
All the majesty and peace,
Let my pain that cannot haunt thee
Fall asunder, writhe and cease.

VI

He was the cunning sort, that gathered men
To feed his intellect upon, in den
Of feathery silk, a spider-weaver, yet
Perverse and hideous to his kind. Forget
The haggard, beaten thing I am and see
The parchment of forbidden years with me.
I am so far from Time I know not whence
Dancing the flight of perfidy I came:
I nourish soul and body with a flame
And deem it recompense.

We walked the melody of space together,
We drew a life from death and bade it tether
Vein to the vein of dust, and voice and pulse
To make the living still, the dead convulse,
And when experiment demanded pain

We laughed and characterized the house as vain,
Draining desire, lest the flesh commit
The soul to death's interminable length,
And we, the strong men prostitute our strength
For glance of reeling wit.

VII

Oh, the house of my soul is a house of clay
And the site is a shifting sand,
Tomorrow the tide may come and all,
Tomorrow, forever, my house may fall,
But the sun is warm at the door today
And I live as long as my house shall stand.

Thrice did I pass my window love,
And thrice did I see thee smile,
For the wind was sweet
And the soul was mad
And the trees in a rhythmic sway the while
Bade the disconsolate heart to beat,
So I rose from the pansy bed at thy feet
And leaned on thy breast and was glad.

VIII

Oh, he left me his home and his garden and thee,
And he left, at his gate, with a laugh;
As yonder marsh hen mocks at the sea
With a swoop and a shiver of ribaldry,
He mocked as he killed what he gave to me
And I swooned as he flung me the lifeless half.

Oh, gather thy strength and lash thy steed
For the quarry is over the mountains gone
And call the countryside as you go
For the hand of a friend is the heart of a foe,
Nor tell of remorse till tomorrow nor heed
The nauseate madness, and hasten on.

IX

Unleash the hounds of bitterness and regret,
Fierce to the scented trail of nostril, let
The blood-sown wind sweep them upon me, blow
The eager breath and fangs as white as snow
Here close to my throat, the burning eyes

Reflecting death in desire. Let me rise
Unto the moon and sever will from truth.
In swiftness they unto the endless chase
As summer clouds that whisper into space
And are gone. Then call it truth?

I wish the moon at morn, the sun at eve,
I wish the terror of the night to slay
Itself and be its counterpart for the day,
Laughing forever, and the hate to weave
Its hissing strands into the garland love,
The last to fascinate, and twine above
My temples; Time dream to decay.

X

Had'st thou but waited when the tide was flood,
There in the deep white offering of the moon,
Had'st thou not flung a spray across the boat
And drowned the passage of our souls too soon,
There were no wanton stirring in the blood,
Nor gleam of hatred on the sea afloat.

Reality is centered in the past,
Tonight is dreaming what the day has done;
Thy pride was like a bat above the mast,
Unbanishable, evil, as the sun
That lurks in the high heavens when the land is parched,
Yet when I smote 'twas not on thee that fell
The judgment scorned of paradise, that marched
In a chain of bright red lightning o'er thy brow,
'Twas here upon this breast that wanders now
The long, interminable path to hell.

THE PASSING OF A SHADOW

I know a nook in utmost solitude,
Covered with moss; beneath a silver rock
Flows forth the crystal silence of a spring.
There in the sorrow of the eve I steal,
Bathed in the moonlight; and the world, asleep,
Knows not nor wonders. There is an art forgotten,
Mystic, I breathe the spirit of the earth.

“Thou art thyself, yet of the whole a part,
Life were as nothing if thou wert not here,
Bearing like column through the turbid night,
Sturdy, the structure of Humanity.”

Hours and hours, or if time be long,
Ages and ages I have waited there,
Knowing the voice would come again, and now:

“Men, in the great world dwelling, myriads; men
Rounding the whole into a mighty mass
And shapeful, over the surface of the earth;
Tillers of fertile plains, of swaying leas;
Herdsman where stern-eyed mountains frown upon
The golden bend of the seashore! Everywhere
Incarnate soul, innumerable lives,
Incarnate soul, yet all no more than one.

Ye are interpreters of thy mother, child,
Formed but to sing with the sea, and with the wind
To run and tussle, shriek and laugh and be still:

As sun loves planet, so ye love, so bless,
Then pass to everlasting destiny.

But play with thy delicate fingers on the reed,
Then cast the reed away: the sound is gone,
The music lingers yet — so lingers life.”

And then the ghostliness of the screech-owl breaks
The ecstasy of that unknown, lipless cry,
With curious quavering, trembling through the dark.
But as the dawn awakens, then, at last,
Before the splendor of a day of hope:

“Oh thou, with mind too small to understand,
Living through ages helpless and alone,
Take to thy breast the love that is not flown,
Mankind, thou art incomparably grand.

MORNING AND EVEN

Morning is dust and even is ash,
Only the day is the fire between,
Only the white waves sweeping low,
Only the eddying winds that blow
Under the sunlight of heaven, are true,
And the love that burns at my heart, and you.

Springtime is faithless and winter responds
As soulless stone to the infant touch,
Give me the summer and drown the rest
As a dross that only supports the best,
And summer wine or a winter's night
And a summer's glow in the anthracite.

Birth is a passion and death is a pain:
I wonder that seekers of wisdom go

To the entrance and exit, and borrow strife
When they dwell in the very house of life;
When the wisdom of summer and love and day
Is theirs, why will they throw it away?

BEFORE THE ORACLE

Intemperance shall not quarrel with the will
But give it sway till rich be riper yet,
For who would draw the clusters from the vine
Until they yearned to sparkle into wine,
To dance among the veins and sing, "Forget."

The plain shall be the solace of the hill
For him who climbs, but on the towering shelf
He must not turn to contemplate the slope,
He must not ask the wind to grant him hope
Nor waste his labor pitying himself.

The world will lift the strong and crush the weak,
The road of life is cluttered all its length
With stoneless graves and tombs unwrit for shame,
Nor shalt thou cry, "I stumbled as I came,"
For in the frailest will is mightiest strength.

The dark will not inspire them that seek
The day is but the masking of the eyes,
Tonight depart, tomorrow is thy choice,
Ask thou from Time the golden gift: *a voice*
That fades into the sunken vale and dies.

CHAOS

The truth is master of the lie,
The fool is lost, the man is shaken,
A breath of wind has crossed the sky
To flame and burn, and merry waken
Light is the deep lake and the stars,
Or draw the pulsate heart of earth
Closer and closer.

The night must wane into the birth
Of dawn, and death give way to dreaming,
Thence into life, for dancing mirth
That finds no rest in sigh or seeming
Strikes with a hissing bolt and mars
The dream of the followers of dust
Deeper and deeper.

Then rise and live, for rise ye must,
Rise and rejoice for Time is driven
Back to the kingdom of dewy lust,
Death to the keeping of Death is given,
And dark new flung from the breast of days
Shatters to bits like an earthen vase,
Broken forever.

AMONG THIEVES

Open, open, ere the sunset slink
Below the marshes, open unto me;
Open, open, ere the nighthawk drink
One silent draught from out the brackish pool,
Ere mist in shrouding horror risen from the sea
Envelop, open, open to the fool!

Hearken, hearken, hearken to the pledge
In hollow echo sounding o'er the waste:
Hearken, hearken; from each rugged ledge
That sloping down slips out into the main
It calls: nor wilder than my heart in trembling haste
Beats out the reeling vision of my brain.

Honor, honor, was it thus before
To slay the best ye sought the strongest out?

Ere I was gone was bolt upon the door
Or hate but hidden in your hearts away?
Hell sets the whole world spinning in a fiendish rout,
In yonder mist I die before the day.

SPIRIT OF AGES

What is the government, what is the law,
What is the strength that holds a people so?
As one would strew the air with seeds
And bid them grow
So are we strewn across the night, in awe,
Like swallows underneath the moon.

Conscious of power, glad in a world's distress,
Proud of the strength to crush, and brook no ill,
A voice cries out in passion'd note
And wild to kill,
"Long have I led and now I bid aggress!
Ye sin that yet ye have not bled."

What is the government, what is the right,
What is the strength that holds a people so?

Are we yet dreamers of the dark
Who cannot know,
Or shall we rise with all a hidden might
And strike the mask from off our eyes!

ANTON

Anton, sprung of the wolf-hound,
Would a'wooing go,
Fair or foul to win or slay,
Fleeting love and fly away,
Bore his dagger on departing
But I took a bow.

Anton, sprung of the wolf-hound,
Slunk beyond the stream,
Like a skulking beast he crept
Where the forest lily slept,
Bent above her half uncertain,
Would not break her dream.

Anton, sprung of the wolf-hound,
Beat upon his brow,

Stood a moment sad and still,
Humbled passion to his will,
Turned and fled into the forest,
Faithful to his vow.

Anton, sprung of the wolf-hound,
Does not know the rest;
Did not see her as she woke,
Did not hear the name she spoke,
Dreaming? Nay! there lies adreaming
Arrow in her breast.

SANCTITY

Evergreens and snow,
Calm and a forest solitude.
The hidden brooklets flow
Under the shielding ice, and strange
Pool witches softly blow
Through dark weeds swaying to and fro,
In restless change.

Place thy lips to mine,
Here in the wilderness of God,
That like a golden wine
Swift may the hidden current bear
The fleeting heart's design:
Deep under snowwhite brows divine
His presence there.

GOLD

Gold, gold, that giveth everything,
A little grain within the eye a-glistening,
To set the blood aglow the ear a-listening,
Gold, gold that giveth everything.

Not as the wine to make men dance and sing,
To tread the earth as cloud on misty wing,
But in the helpless heart alone
To make it grand or barren as thine own,
Gold, gold that giveth everything.

Not as the filmy soul to make men pray for,
In weary pilgrimage to search the day for,
Thine is a little strand the whole world compassing,
A little rainbow strand to which they cling,
And when they have thee, lo, thy grace is flown,
Gold, gold that giveth everything.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

Youth dreams and age regrets,
Youth's dream is of a day
Unknown and of a hidden reckoning;
Youth dreams and age regrets,
And trembling age regrets
But of the past and lost youth beckoning.

Youth gazes forward, age behind,
Youth sees the rising of the golden sun
Youth sees the day in all its splendor light;
Youth gazes forward, age behind,
And trembling age behind
As crimson sunset whispers of the night.

Youth fears, but age is strong,
Youth's fear is of a Time
That taketh all and giveth naught in stead;
Youth fears, but age is strong,
Yea, trembling age is strong
And laughs — though on the morrow it be dead.

DRAGON

I fear him where the long grass waves,
I fear him in the limpid, silent pool;
Where deep the sensuous shadows of the glen
Enveil me, there the form I know
 Uprises at my feet.

Dull eyes that fascinate and greet,
A saffron throat whereon the sun may glow
In vain, but for the life pulse now and then.
I fear him, hear him, yet the fool
 Takes ever what he craves.

THE ETERNAL

1

The long day comes
After the dawn,
And the murmur of drums
Rolling and beating, hushed and repeating.

2

The white mist steals
Over the land
And a dark vulture wheels
High in the graven clouds like a craven.

3

The death guns boom
Into the light
With a fiery doom
Belched from each swelling throat and repelling.

Thou, it is Thou
Come with the day,
Let a kiss on my brow
Still the discerning life and the burning.

Take Thou the pain
Out of mine eyes
And the vision of slain
Held in each greening flash and careening.

CONFESSION OF HOPE

A stirring in my veins,
The wind in the poplar trees,
A whisper on my brow:
As quivering prayer the thunderbolt restrains.
As shore is impotent to the seas
Life sweeps me onward now.

My cast is with the breath
Of multitudes; with the waves
My hope is; with the whole,
With all this little world of worlds: who saith,
“Seek him and him alone who saves
Himself,” he hath no soul.

And if I pledge this clay
Unto the eternal night,

And if I wish for rest,
Still is the burning of the summer's day
To claim its mockery of light
And me? And is it best?

Up through the shadow loft
Of murmuring pines and tall,
Unto the stars my prayer
Shall go, and though the winged cry be soft
And unto earth again it fall
Must it not find Thee there?

ATONEMENT

I fear the quiet treachery of things,
I steal away from over-golden day
And in some somber cavern hide myself,
Time moves, day goes, not I
I cannot die.

I watch the panther and the fluttering wings
Of some wild-throated, pinioned bird of prey,
I shrink at death, draw back, and hide myself,
Like flows and ebbs, not I
I cannot die.

God gave the enormous harmony of light,
Yet what is God and what am I to see
Aught else but that I list and flee,
Baring my breast and shrieking in the flight.
Dead, dead, he lies, not I
I will not die.

WHAT IS THINE ANSWER?

This is the land where the shadows move,
Stealthily, softly, coming and going,
This is the land where the cymbals crash,
The quivering drums and the tramp of feet,
The voice of thunder and serpent lash,
Where all things opposite stumble and meet
And steel springs up from the early sowing,
Terror and love.

Summer is lost and the fields are white,
Life from the heather and plain is leading
All that remains of her pillaged fold,
Back from the frozen brook and the stealth
Of the white-armed lover of death, the cold,
The scorner that mocks at her hoarded wealth,

The wolf that comes when her breast is bleeding,
Out of the night.

This is the land of the glistening throne,
Gifted with life, and reviler of living,
This is the temple of sunken hope,
The candle-hung garden of dreamless sleep
Where blind and visioned together grope,
Where night-blown shadows their vigils keep
Over the tomb of recalcitrant giving,
Graven in stone.

The white arm droops from the golden lute,
The strings re-echo the burst of playing,
A silence hangs on the ruddy lips
Where dies the fountain of song at its source,
But far through a shadowy vale there slips
A river of pain in a turbulent course,
Its waters red with the wine of slaying,
Writhing and mute.

Perhaps if the dawn shall come again,
Or night bind up her sable tresses,
Closing her eyes, and faint away,
Blown from the morning as dreams are blown,
Flinging her heritage to the day
Nor life remember the visions flown
And blush to a crimson with new caresses,
Has it been vain?

SPRING

Bright robes and brightly flowing,
Fair tresses, violet eyes,
Soft dimples, coming, going
Like wanton butterflies!

Who cares that time is fleeting,
Who weeps that all must fade;
When mad the heart is beating
Who loves and is afraid?

Come closer, closer, tell me
The secret of thy call;
Down to thy lips compel me
One moment, that is all.

DISDAIN

Love is a mistress of the wine of night,
For in the breeze no passion lives, the spray
That flings a million harmonies to the wave
Is free.

And love is drowsy, sensuous, of the clay,
The harbinger of birth,
A listlessness, a lesion of the sense,
A dream hallucination, to deprave
Affinity of soul and earth.

High in a flurry of golden fleece
A wing dips out of the endless blue,
And quivering down the morning sky,
Loud and sweet and swift and true,
I the courier of caprice
Hark to the consonance of a cry:
If love he scorned of beauty, love must die!

DREAM AND LOVE

Tomorrow was the palace where I dwelt,
Tomorrow was the temple of my dreams,
Till I met you.

I knew no morn of wakening but I felt
The fancied murmur of far distant streams
That fell into the blue.

The spring spoke myriad tongues of coming life,
Each summer came and fled into the past
With all the rest.

Each autumn, weary of the unequal strife,
Hid her bright features in the winter's blast.
Said I, "Tomorrow's best."

But when I saw you smile, and felt your warm
Sweet lips steal closer unto mine, away

The vision sped.

You banished dreams in one great, withering storm
Of truth: This is Tomorrow's Yesterday,
Awake ere you be dead.

FOAM OF DEEP AND CLOUD OF SKY

Foam of deep and cloud of sky,
Lovely, sea-blown butterfly,
Soft outspread and floating far
Down the whisper of a blast,
Flash of moons and murky things
Fainting on thy velvet wings.
Yet I tremble lest it be
Our dear love that's blown to sea, Sweetheart.

WOMAN

Wake softly, softly
As the rose unfoldeth,
Pale red bud and perfume breathing,
Wake softly, softly;
Earth no longer holdeth
In her cup of emerald, wreathing
Night, wake, awake.

Rise gently, gently,
O'er thy stirring bosom
Velvet lies the sunlight golden,
Rise gently, gently,
Blushing like a blossom
By the virgin morn beholden,
Gently rise, arise.

Sing lightly, lightly
In the day's devotion,
Free thy hair from binding sorrow,
Sing lightly, lightly;
With a fearless motion
Fling it far into the morrow,
Lightly sing, sing.

Love, maiden, maiden,
Life is like a flower,
Let thine heart untutored teach thee;
Love, maiden, maiden,
In thy golden hour
And no sullied lips shall reach thee,
Maiden, love love.

Prate, nodding, nodding,
In the day's declining
Life must wear a dark complexion,
Prate, nodding, nodding;
In the shadows twining

Present speech is past reflection;
Nodding, prate, prate.

Sleep ever, ever,
Far thy brand is burning
O'er the stream of darkest flowing,
Sleep, ever, ever;
To the night returning,
Painless, dreamless is thy going;
Sleep, forever sleep.

IN THE WILDERNESS

Within thy cheek the faintest rose reborn:
Perhaps we shall divide the night and thine
Be one part and the other mine, or call
Across the wasteland where the torrents fall
In foaming resonance o'er the dark incline.

My part thy trust, my trust thy bending low
To measure evening as the waters go
Dreaming into the snowwhite breast of morn;
Thy part to sleep, my part to watch thee so!

REDEMPTION

I came, last night, so close to death,
That, rising to the last request
I forced his jaws apart and gazed,
Twixt fang and fang, twixt opiate breath
And sleep, into the rose-pink throat.
“I sail the far ways of the sea,”
I cried, and swooned upon his breast.

The fancied hours whirled about
Like sunlight dancing in the wine
Till soon, with senses more amazed
Than true, the spirit wandered out
Into the past. I heard the note
Of whippoorwill in the apple tree
And woke to find your hand in mine.

I CANNOT HIDE YOU

I cannot hide you in my heart
Because my eyes disclose
Through distant gazing, or a sudden start
Of light, yourself: Away my secret goes!

I cannot screen you in a mind
That dreams the days, between
Our meeting, dreams, and seeks in vain to find
Repose therein, and tears away the screen.

I come before the drowsy moon
Awakes in the purple sky.
And we shall know the eternal secret soon
Of dusk and love and summer, — you and I.

Thus I can hide you, in my arms,
Thus witch the pain away
Till dawn comes stealing in across the farms
And life rejoices in a golden day.

TURN TO MY ARMS

Turn to the east, and turn to the west,
Turn to the south and the north, and then
Smiling at sorrow and seeking afar,
Turn to my arms again.

The gleam in your eyes is the beacon of fame.
That burns to an endless goal
From mountain to mountain across the years
Till desire dies in a valley of tears,
Till the red fades out of the beacon flame
And love fades out of the soul.

Rustle of dead leaves, groan of bough
Tossing to no avail
Under the turquoise winter sky
Jewelled and distant and cold and high.

Your strength would follow the tempest now
And rustle dead things and fail.

Turn to the wisdom of other days,
Question the seekers that wandered in vain,
Think of the love you will find at my heart
And turn to my arms again.

I SENT HER FORTH

I sent her forth,
For men spurn most the things they love the best,
And, blinding vision to her higher worth,
I cast her out to battle with the rest
That snarl and surge around law's prudent door.
She comes no more.

She cannot win.
No soul of flesh won any battle yet,
That blustered out to tournament with sin.
Always they come and plead that we forget.
With lowered eyes and cheeks that flame and burn
She will return.

Mine is the shame.
For I have lost the blessing of a heart

That beat for me, that I might hold the name
Of master — from some distant dream I start
And in the darkness struggle to define
Two lips at mine.

UNBIND THY HAIR

Unfold the beauty of a whispering night,
Sweep magically over me again
The restless sable robe that with a flight
Of stars floods all my soul. Oh, let me wake,
Casting into the torrent of the rain
The dreams I dream, forever, and partake,
Of love long lost, long hidden under pain.

Oh drench me in a shower of the dark
And drown me in a whirlpool of despair,
But save me from the relentless hours that mark
The grains of sand swift slipping from the cup.
When all that quivers in the cup is care,
Oh fill the olden, golden goblet up
With misty night, mine own — unbind thy hair!

GOOD BYE

Whisper thy secret, love,
Time will not stay,
Hold me yet closer, love,
Just for today.

Long will thy paradise
Fade in despair,
Founded on structure, love
Frailer than air.

Vast is the ocean, love,
Silent and blue,
Vast thine emotion, love,
Deeper and true.

Find me tomorrow, love,
Dead on the plain,
Broken with sorrow, love,
Striven in vain.

Stars and a wilderness,
Light that has flown,
Life has forgotten, love,
We are alone.

THE LAST MORNING

I seat myself upon a crystal throne,
I swathe my temples in a golden band
And smile as through the arras, softly blown,
Sweeps the wide beauty of the sunlit land.

Oh God, why hast Thou made the world so sweet;
Oh barren heart what hast thou left to give,
That like the poppy blushing in the wheat
Thou findest joy in loneliness to live?

Long have I sought as doth a feeble spark
Borne on the night wind cast its light of pain;
I will no longer juggle with the dark,
Soul of my soul I come to thee again!

REGRET

I never knew the summer till it passed,
I never knew the sunlight till it fled,
I never knew the day but with the last
Bright star of eve to comfort me instead.

Oft when the tide stood hesitant and still
And when I laughed and dreamed it was mine own
It drew its waters to a sterner will
And left me wondering on the beach alone.

Now thou art gone the veil is flung apart,
Now thou art gone! but in my soul there lies
The wind of yesterday, close to my heart
Low whispering, and the dark sea of thine eyes.

CRY

Thou wert so fair that night I thought not death
But sleep possessed thee; moonbeams played as breath
Over thy lips that wronged love fancied red:
Then closer, closer to my heart I pressed thee,
Scornful of life that marked thy spirit dead.

They say I crept like craven from the room
And ran wild-shrieking through the night, as doom
Swept low the feeble structures of a mind:
But in my soul I heard thine accents speaking,
Speaking like dead rose to the autumn wind.

SCARLET WIFE

How canst thou breathe so sweet a sleep
The while,
How can thy cheeks glow with a tender red,
Thy breast so even rise and fall
When wild my heart is into swiftness fled,
My temples throbbing to the trumpet call
Of madness knocking loudly at my head:
How canst thou breathe so sweet a sleep
And smile?

CONSOLATION

Whisper to me — they called me fool, wild, madman;
Charlatans they, who mocked in symmetry
Of heartless ignorance; chaffed in weight of chaff;
Laughed in their own fool-laughter, whilst I sought
By every vestige, every living clue,
To know the truth e'er life had sped away.

Whisper to me — I know thine anguish well;
Broken, alone and helpless, on and on
I struggled: on and on, and nowhere. Bonds
That life had riveted to me clinked, as death
Scattered the lights of knowledge in the dust:
Teeth of a dragon ne'er to reawake.

And men will strive as I have striven, ever,
Die as I died, wasted, mind and limb;

For, fearing we might understand herself,
Life has turned torturess: given sight enough
That we must see, as tottering into dark,
Each individual life; ourselves and all we love.

Move not away, but place thy gentle lips
On the white stone that marks a ruined end,
Thus I receive thy blessing, and thou mine:
Pass on, we shall not meet again, my friend.

THE TALE OF THE GREY WOLF

1

Boldly I spoke, and trembled at the words,
“For you will tell me ere the night departing
Steal thee away a dream before the morn.
Come ope those glistening jaws wherein the fangs
Give back the livid tincture of the moon!
Come move that tongue more wont within the race
To loll and drip, than in the subtleties
Of speech to spin the intricate to fashion!
I know thee well, grey wolf: a single sweep
And this sharp blade will tell if red thy blood
Or green. Speak! for I tarry not. The way
Is long, afar the lamp is hung above
The darkened lintel of the tavern door:
There shall thy tale be told, and maid and master

Wonder at me for that I feared thee not:
There shall thy tale be told or else the spit
Turned by the potboy o'er the roaring blaze,
Hiss with the last faint quiverings of thy heart."

As first I spoke, quite unafraid he looked
Not at my lips as men do; but my eyes
Gauged the intent for him. Then slow he turned
And on the moon fixed his intensive gaze,
Long puzzling at its bright placidity.

Slow up he rose, and yawned and stretched his legs,
Then like the wind fled out among the pines
Where endless lay the darkened avenues
Of night; and I was after him alone.

Silent I sped, and swifter than the hound,
Silent away and truer to the trail,
Guided by instinct. One by one the trees
Told out the varied swingings of my sword
That smote their sturdy sides and rang away.
Now came the moon perhaps, or now was lost

Where monstrous boughs in monstrous shadows hung,
Frighting the soul, but yet the heart within
Beat to the maddening fervor of the hunt
And I must on behind the fleeing thing.

At last I fell: a heavy, twisted root,
Sprung from the earth as some loud-thundering wind
Beat low the noble posture of the trunk,
Quick held, then flung me headlong to the ground.

A growling rush, a shadow overhead,
The snap of empty jaws; and then a long
Low snarl of pain. So had the grey wolf leapt,
So leapt, then fled like coward where the trail
Descended.

Trembling I stood and down my face
The blood streamed copiously; each gasping breath
Discovered pains new-seated in my bosom:
Onward I strove, half knowing where I went.

II

High risen, like the river's ghost to flow
Where ages past the stronger river went,
Soft and uncertain in its fashioning
The moonlight played upon the canyon mist.
Thrice down the echoing incline I hurled
The resonant defiance of a hate.

"Who calls?" a woman's voice, and strangely rich
And clear, "Who calls the grey wolf from the heights?"
Perhaps the tale, though pledged above the glass,
Perhaps, though told in partial drunkenness,
Were true! "Come, stranger, nor in rage descend,
Nor fear." I felt a sapling quiver now,
Under my hand: My eyes in dizziness
Revolved the world about me; moon and stars
Went swimming down amid the senseless void
And high above, between the glowering walls
The river mist went creeping on and on.

Now down the hill I stumbled, breathing slow,
While heart and brain beat wild in one accord:

"I come," I cried, "Though troubled be the way
I come, I come; thy voice like silken thread
Leads me afar through interwoven glades,
Yet nearer, nearer, downward to thy feet."

Alone she knelt, and o'er a swirling pool,
Far in mid-river, dipped a goblet low.
Then I like a fountain from the sylvan sward,
Enrobed in silk, ensilvered by the moon
She rose, and saw me, smiling. Through the stream,
As comes a moonbeam through the night, she came,
Bearing the goblet high above her head.

Before a rock encroaching on the way,
A rock of awful massiveness and strength,
Rising, a dark head in the vast ravine,

We stood. Then of the goblet's potion drank I
Deeply, and cried to her that stood beside
To bid and I would do whate'er she willed.
No task it seemed — as I would lift a hand
Today and wonder not that it obeyed.

So did I heave the boulder from its sheath
Of crumbling rock and stubborn mountain brush
And cast it crashing downward through the night.

“Behold,” she said, and as I turned from harking
Unto the fall of that which I had thrown,
A light of gold, in magic soft and low
Enthralled me.

On the threshold of a cave
The grey wolf, bristling, bared his fangs and snarled:
But oh, beyond, a hideous spectre sat,
A frightful skeleton that lived and grinned
In mockery of the gold, mosaic walls.

Then stealthily from out a glittering heap,
Two coins it plucked and held them to the light,
Clacking its knees and swaying to and fro.
Aloud I shrieked for there before my eyes
The coins turned human faces; one that smiled
And one that wept, in likeness of my own;
Then back to the table fell they and were coins.

"This," said the maid, "the grey wolf's secret is;
And this is God's" — three kisses on my lips,
Three kisses like the ocean's kiss in May —
And with the third I swooned into the dawn.

THE RETURN

I

“Why are the whistles booming so,
Why is the hum of the turbines low?
Is it land? What land? Where’s France? Where’s France?
And Joe, my bunkey, where is Joe?
He would not leave me for the sight
Of land. I asked for him last night:
Your face it says you do not know.
Oh God, it’s true, he’s dead. Dance, dance
Ye lights and shrapnel, ye that kill
And put to sleep, nor maim the sense
As that vile lotus-breath: — Intense
But sweet, insidious — Yes, I will be still!”

II

“Who are these people by my bed?

Yes, I know you — you’re mother — dead,

I thought — oh no, not you, — sometimes

I think I’ve jugglers in my head.

It’s Joe that’s gone — in a flash of light,

Lost as a firefly in the night,

And I’ve a living death instead.

Joe, that was luck!

Your face, and chimes,

And orange blossoms! till it seems

You are the bride I knew, my Ruth,

I wish to call this vision truth;

Oh, say I’m dreaming life, not living dreams!”

III

“Each night, my love, you prayed and wept,
Each night caressed me as I slept,
And stole back to your single bed,
While I waxed stronger, grew adept
At linking thoughts together late
Into darkness — but you could not wait —
Last night in the joy of strength I crept
To your room — and saw — and would have fled
But for the flame in my veins. I fell,
Like the wreck I was, in the sombre hall,
You found me when you heard the fall.
The dead return to life to find earth hell!”

IV

"I speed to France from whence I came.
A girl of the wheat fields to my name
Alone, if I should not return,
Swore an eternal truth — the same
Your false lips whispered a year ago.
Oh yes, in health and strength and flow
Of wealth and friends you wish the blame
To rest on me — Why do they burn,
Those crimson cheeks? Why do your eyes
Fear looking into mine, the true?
The love I had was all for you,
Take his love now who perjured paradise."

THE MOON ON THE PALISADES

I

I follow the moon to the Palisades
Where the dead brush blows on the rocky walls,
And streams are frozen in white cascades
And torrents steal to the silent falls
Like Ghosts, on the Palisades.

II

I follow the moon to the Palisades
For the call of my heart is to be alone.
The forest merges to darkness and fades
In the shadows hiding the steeps of stone
From the moon, on the Palisades.

III

I follow the moon to the Palisades
To merge myself and my secret so,
Till the morning comes and the dark evades
The cliff to hide in the caves below
At dawn, on the Palisades.

IV

I follow the moon to the Palisades
Where solitude whispers that Death is free
From pain; that a fantasy soul degrades
The living to sense servility.
There is peace on the Palisades.

V

I follow the moon to the Palisades
And a spirit rises over the waste
As battle-smoke over the gleaming blades
And I know that the spirit of death is chaste
As the moon on the Palisades.

SONG OF A SUICIDE

Last golden eve I watched a quivering star
Fall the long firmament to the hush of space,
Last eve I rose against the giant face
Of night and cried my sorrowing afar.

Last golden eve I knelt upon the strand,
I tasted of the brine and laughed and wept.
I felt the pulse of Time and thought it slept
And held it close and found it was the sand.

Last golden eve my memories of thee
Like startled bird into the dark I flung
And watched them flutter where the moonbeams hung:
Last golden eve I stumbled in the sea

THE WEEPER

He who so stood beneath the willow's shade,
Thigh-deep in the river, and with brimming eyes
Noted the constant coursing of the tide
That flowed, now swift, now slow, yet ever flowed;
There seeing the hidden truth, life's parallel,
Time changeth all, the river never is
The selfsame river — yet no more he saw —
Found consolation in a woman's arms;
Drowned his poor sorrow in a vinous glow.

Oh now, long years forgotten, he is gone,
And others dwell as he dwelt, through the land,
The crystal waters sweep the same bright banks,
The wind-song in the willows still is young.
Life though it changeth must forever be

The same — Life unto death, yet ere it dies
New life bursts forth from out the strength of youth —
As long as sun and earth shall sway as now
Death cannot conquer — change is only change.

Oh fool, why must thou ever seek divinity beyond,
Knowing each life must yield, then yield itself at last,
And, fearing, blind thyself unto the truth of all:
Thine immortality takes birth with every child?

AT DUSK

I fear the soft glow of the evening lamps
And the imperceptible passing of things
From truth of vision to shadow being,
The sycophant presence of him that clings
To the coming of darkness in sable wings.
I fear the remorseless terror that stamps
The pallor death to the brow of seeing,
That leaves the clay in its strange desire
Hearts of jet in souls of fire.

Out of the even the mists of light
Flung in a suppliant moon-appeal
Stream to exhaustion in void of ebon,
Sanctioning gifts of the dust that steal
Eternal being from earthen seal.

And bodies fall from the spirit's flight
For spiderous silence to fashion a web on.
Torn from the earth and the surge of the main
We sink to the bosom of earth again.

EVENING

I will not know, for yet I think thee near
In this last silence: o'er my brow thy hand
Steals like a summer wind; the chalice ear
Holds whisperings from a ne'er forgotten land.
How dark my soul, and like an endless wood
That knows no light upon its shadowy face
Save when the moon comes with her silver flood
To sweep foreboding terror from the place.
I feel thy lily breath upon my hair,
I struggle up, I raise my lips to bless
Thy presence, but the void, unhallowed air
Cries down upon me in my loneliness:
Then with a fluttering heart and with the fright
Of death, I ope mine eyes and gaze into the night!

THE END OF THE TRAIL

Hand upon brow, and in fearlessness
Scanning the heavens,
Conscious and proud of the youth of him,
Tall and stately and handsome,
Bares he to sunset the sacred strength of his bosom;
Prays in the hopefulness of a day of grace
To the Great Spirit.

Soft as the purr of the puma,
Deep in the heart of the valley,
Murmurs the bowstring.

Slender and swift,
Like to the hiss of the adder
Whispers the arrow.

Silent the crest is, alone; and the darkness

O'er the abysses

Draws her keep mantle, relentless.

Oh, but Thy hand o'er a brow

Wilder than death, where it rests on the rocks of the canyon

Sootheth unseen the last of a noble race:

Thou, the Great Spirit!

THE STORY OF THE JUDGE

'Tis bosomed deep in utmost secrecy,
Fearful of nothing, for the seal is death:
And I can laugh the whole world in the face,
Humor its sorrows or cajole its cares,
A favored child. Mayhap its brimming fold
Will give a yearling for new sacrifice,
Life for a life: most carefully will the noose
Be played until some lamb, unwary, feed
Within the precinct of the evidence
And all is silent.

Now the joyful blood
Careers through my veins in orgiastic life!
The dark clouds of remorse are trembling now
Before the strength of this wild, wind-swept heaven
And unlulled breezes singing of success.

I am no more a man, but tempered high,
Sprung to an element through a blessed act;
Sacred my path shall be o'er all the earth,
Man must acknowledge me as strong of will,
As pure of heart, and scatter roses low,
Bowling to me, for I am innocent:
Crime undiscovered is a guiltless crime!

What ails thee, world? Though I be obdurate
Yet am I not a fool. Thy pity knows
The living, — cowering yonder, — but as judge
I see a countenance unredeemable.
Hush thy rude voices! Though 'twas done unseen,
No man becomes a sinner till he sins,
And then is more the sinner for his past.
A wondrous chance has thrown into our hands
The chain that links the doer with the deed,
Each pulse that stirs within a murderer's heart
Is venom bubbling through the well of life:
Death is the sentence!

Now the court is still,
Freed the long session of its loud unrest:
Quiet, quiet speaks of the coming night.
Yet would I hold thee, day, as love unfaithful,
Knowing thy long departure, slow return,
Yet read from thine eyes that all regret is vain;
Oh stay with me, I fear the dark, oh stay!
For with her own white fingers have I torn
The lily breast of Truth: Oh stay with me!

The risen moon is like a thread of gold,
Virgin, as thou wert, and as soon to pass;
Dim in its bending cup thy face is dreaming,
Closed are thine eyes, and o'er a pallid brow
The languid moonbeams wave thy molten hair.

Speak to me, speak! Oh God, am I so low?
So low! What cares the universe for me,
A maddened fool who in the way of dreams
Governed the living in the force of law,
Masking his hideous self unwittingly!

A poison draught to end a poisoned life,
And then I climb that vast stairway beyond,
Upward and upward to eternity:
Over the shadowy steps thy light will come,
Whispering endless time, unbroken faith.

Sail on forever till the night shall hide thee,
Fled from a world whose cares are not thine own,
Dream into darkness till the star beside thee
Mourn his lost lover, in the sky alone!

MY FAITH

I hear no call of bird, no drone of bee,
I hear no murmur of the hastening stream,
This is a barren waste that was the sea,
Things that have been live now but in a dream.

Long shadows hover in the dim midday,
Spectres that leer at noon's low-flaming sun,
Motionless sentinels of the dark that say,
"Thy reign is o'er nor ours is yet begun."

What is this life so given, so returned,
What is this soul so free to rise and soar,
That when the flickering, paltry flame be burned
Dies into vastness and is known no more?

Forever the dawn may come, the cold of death
Stills not my heart. Throughout the wandering sphere
Life cannot be destroyed: a sun's last breath
Means but the winter of a faltering year.

What is must always be, the past yet live,
For Time is but the measurement of today,
Dies not the tree that swift its leaves must give,
Spring blows reborn what autumn sweeps away.

False rest, I know thee now; life ever takes
From out the night the soul that would be free,
Thou'rt but a sleep that morning re-awakes:
Almighty GOD, there is no Death but Thee.

AS I PRAY

Two little drops of poison on the velvet throne
That glisten in the dark lamp's ghostliness,
Two little drops that fluttered from thy cup;
And didst thou tremble so
Or was it pain that far thy lips below
Flung out the glass all shattered and alone.
Wouldn't thou in death confess?
Lies in thy palm half lifted up
No plaintive line of sorrowing for me
To still the burn of infidelity,
Or are these drops to eyes of demon grown?

THE PESTILENCE

I have come in the dark, I have come in the day,
I have come in the dusk and the dawn,
I have won the mad race with the ships on the sea,
And none shall escape me and none shall be free,
The pleading of age nor the boasting of youth,
Nor the power of wisdom and brawn.

No question is asked and no answer desired,
If bidden to enter and ride
Why the past is a fancy and only a gleam
Through the rust of a sword that is swung in a dream,
You speed a swift honeymoon out of the world
And you travel with death as a bride.

Oh, hate and aggression and falsehood and scorn
Are crushed by the wheels as I go,

For the fear of the scourge that I hold in my hand,
The terror that knows the resistless command
Makes *living* the only distinction of life
From the rest that lies dead in the snow.

IN A GLASS OF RED WINE

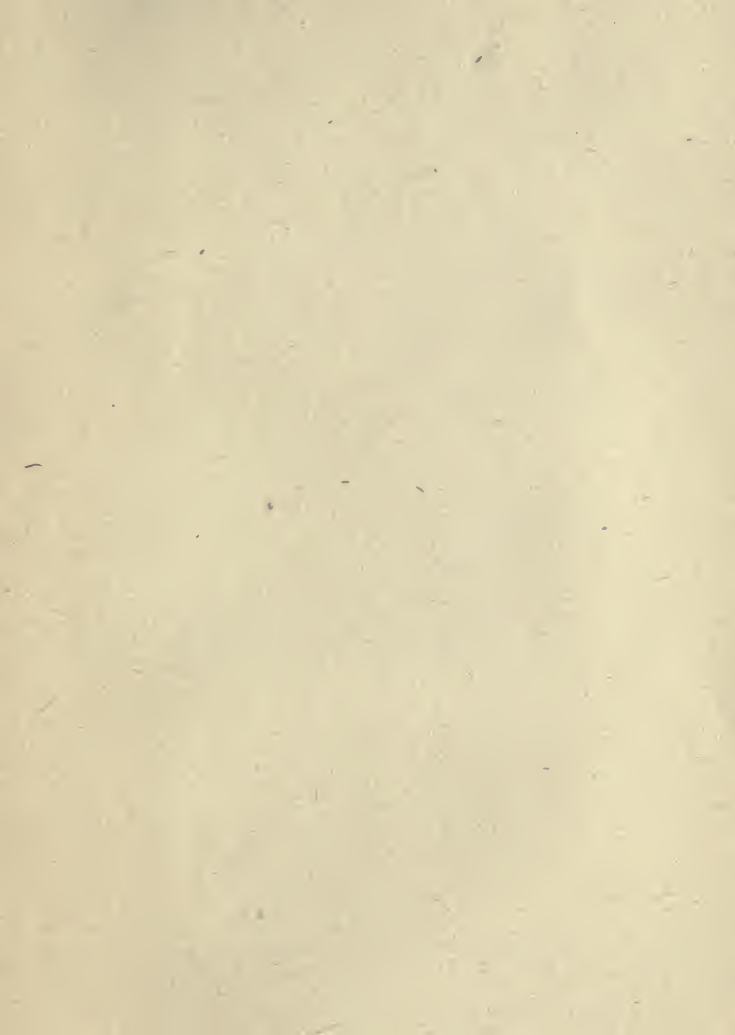
Droop low thine arms that hover o'er me now,
In subtle, easy curve, like temple arch
Mosaic hung and soft in the sunset spell.
Bend down thy perfumed head, on lips that parch
For a breath of unselfish love, and on my brow
Rest thine, dark maid, nor heed the mosque-hour bell.

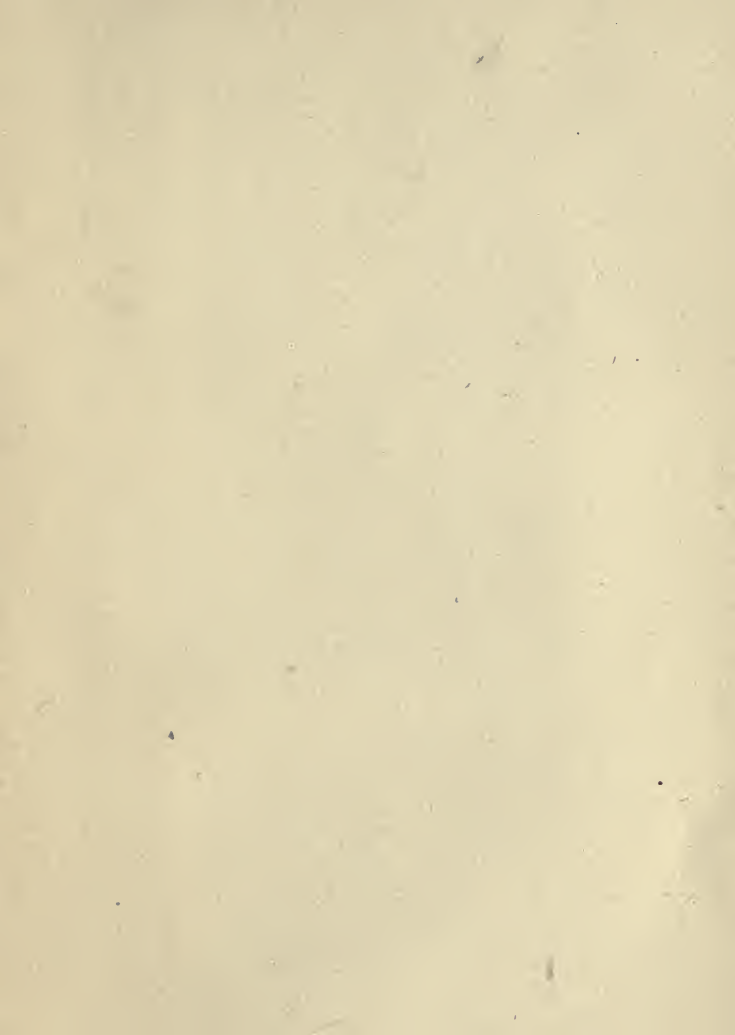
Far north the paramour white winter lies,
As false as one I loved. Luxuriate
The rising sun flings diamonds to the snow,
And she dwells in that land; yet passing the gate
To our home some friend may turn away his eyes
Where footsteps enter though they do not go.

So fold me closer, hold me nearer, steal
With thy great, limpid eyes forgotten flame

From mine, let blind devotion call to those
Who see naught else and bow till they be lame
Let Allah speak what breast and bosom feel
And limb on limb, and lips that meet and close.

THE END





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